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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PO](#)  
SUBJECT: PORTUGAL'S AFGHANISTAN DRAWDOWN

Classified By: political/economic counselor Matt Harrington for reasons  
1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary  
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¶1. (C/NF) In a November 9 lunch with DATT and P/E Counselor, the Foreign Minister's diplomatic advisor, Paulo Lourenco, made it clear that President Cavaco Silva himself was behind Portugal's recently announced decision to reduce its contributions to ISAF beginning in August 2008. Lourenco said the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Minister of Defense had all been opposed to the decision, which had been motivated by concerns about eroding public support. He regretted the timing of the decision as well, coming as it did just before the force regeneration conference and escalating operations against the Taliban. Lourenco said the United States was the only ally to have expressed concern about the drawdown and he asked pointedly whether we had been in touch with the President's senior diplomatic advisor and the head of his military household. He added that it would be especially helpful if other NATO allies in addition to the United States weighed in on this issue. We will report separately Portugal's views on next steps, based on the Ambassador's conversations with the Minister of Defense and others. End Summary.

The Decision  
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¶2. (C/NF) Paulo Lourenco said the decision to reduce Portugal's contribution to ISAF from a rapid reaction company to a C-130 and a 15-person OMLT in August 2008 had been made "a long time ago" in a heated discussion in the Supreme Defense Council. He said the military service chiefs, the CHOD, the Prime Minister, and Ministers of Defense and of Foreign Affairs had all opposed the decision to draw down. Although Lourenco did not say so directly, it was clear that President Cavaco Silva himself was the driving force behind the move, apparently motivated by concern about escalating violence and the growing possibility of casualties, and the consequent impact on public opinion.

¶3. (C) We expressed strong concern that we had read about the decision initially in an Iranian news service piece about an appearance by the Minister of Defense before a parliamentary committee. Lourenco said he wished there had been prior consultation with Allies before the announcement, noting that it had been the Ministry of Defense that had been responsible for the rollout. He said pointedly that he would not have handled the announcement in the same way. We underlined that the effort in Afghanistan is a critical NATO effort that will have security-related consequences for all Allies. The consequences of failure were unacceptable. Was this a view widely-held within the Portuguese government? Lourenco replied that it was by most key government officials, but carefully omitted the President's office.

¶4. (C) Lourenco said that political leaders have an obligation to convince their publics of the importance of the fight in Afghanistan, and he expressed regret that Portuguese politicians have not done nearly enough in this regard. Asked whether the NATO-run program that arranges travel of journalists in Allied countries to Afghanistan would be helpful in shaping Portuguese public opinion in a positive way, Lourenco thought it would, and he undertook to discuss that option with Portugal's NATO Mission.

Reaction from NATO

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¶5. (C) Lourenco said there has been no reaction to the Portuguese decision other than ours, either from the NATO Secretariat or from other Allies. He stated that Portugal's

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commitment to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan remains strong, and he noted that his country's specific contributions to ISAF have been cyclical. They began with a C-130 and air traffic controllers, then deployed a commando company to the south without caveats, and now are adjusting their contribution again. He implied the GOP could increase its contribution in the future. He suggested that having additional Allies weigh in with Portugal might be helpful in shaping future Portuguese contributions, although he stopped short of speculating on whether such approaches would affect the August drawdown. He asked pointedly whether we had raised the drawdown with President Cavaco Silva's senior diplomatic advisor and head of military household.

Comment

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¶6. (C) Lourenco was careful but frank in his comments, which are consistent with earlier reports from a variety of sources that President Cavaco Silva was not a big fan of Portugal's ISAF deployment. We will reach out to the President's senior diplomatic and military advisors, but we think it might be helpful for Allied heads of government and the NATO Secretary-General to weigh in directly with the President, asking Portugal to reconsider its drawdown. We will report separately Portugal's thinking on next steps, based on the Ambassador's conversations with the Minister of Defense and others.

Hoffman